

Transylvania County Natural Area Inventory

LITTLE RIVER WETLAND COMPLEX Significant Natural Heritage Area

Site Significance: State

Size: 70 acres

Quadrangle: Brevard

Ownership: Private

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: The site incorporates a diverse assemblage of wetland and riparian forest communities along the Little River and one of its unnamed tributaries. Boggy areas and stream corridors here support a number of rare plants, including one of the best populations of bog Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema triphyllum* ssp. *stewardsonii*) in the state and other species such as swamp pink (*Helonias bullata*), robin runaway (*Dalibarda repens*), French Broad heartleaf (*Hexastylis rhombiformis*), small-leaved meadow-rue (*Thalictrum macrostylum*), and Cuthbert's turtlehead (*Chelone cuthbertii*). The site also provides excellent habitat for a variety of wildlife, including migratory birds, amphibians, and invertebrates, and serves as a corridor connecting a string of wetlands along the Little River and its tributaries.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: The Little River Wetland Complex is located in the Buck Forest Macrosite on the south side of US 276 in Cedar Mountain. The site encompasses the Little River channel, an unnamed tributary that flows into the river from the southwest, and associated wetlands and floodplain forest along their length. The site forms a corridor between Cedar Mountain Bog and the Little River. A number of other Significant Natural Heritage Areas are in the immediate vicinity. The Little River/Cedar Mountain Natural Area and Reasonover Swamp Forest-Bog Complex lie to the east/northeast of the site, and Buckhorn Creek Slopes and Bogs is due north across US 276. Little River Wetland Complex is mostly surrounded by forested areas, though the highway borders the site to the north and growing residential areas are nearby on all sides.

SITE DESCRIPTION: Little River Wetland Complex encompasses a low-lying area in the floodplain of the Little River, an unnamed tributary, and portions of adjacent forested slopes. The wetland portion of the site is dominated by a patchwork of wet woods, early successional wetland habitat, a Southern Appalachian Bog, Swamp Forest-Bog Complex, and Montane Alluvial Forest. The river appears to have meandered or shifted at some point in the past as evidenced by abandoned relic channels along its length. These relic channel segments (oxbows) contain a number of boggy depressions and a significant Floodplain Pool natural community.

A Southern Appalachian Bog occurs in the floodplain of the Little River south of US 276. This bog contains a diverse mosaic of different strata and habitat types. Some scattered forested areas have a canopy comprised of red maple (*Acer rubrum*), black gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*), pines (*Pinus strobus* and *P. rigida*), and other scattered hardwoods. Shrub zones are dominated by silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*), swamp dewberry (*Rubus hispidus*), white meadow-sweet (*Spiraea alba*), steeplebush (*S. tomentosa*), male-berry (*Lyonia ligustrina*), possum-haw viburnum (*Viburnum nudum*), and winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*). Herbs include seepage rush (*Juncus gymnocarpus*), sedges (*Carex* spp.), sneezeweed (*Helenium flexile*), chain fern (*Woodwardia areolata*), lady fern (*Athyrium asplenoides*), arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*), cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*),